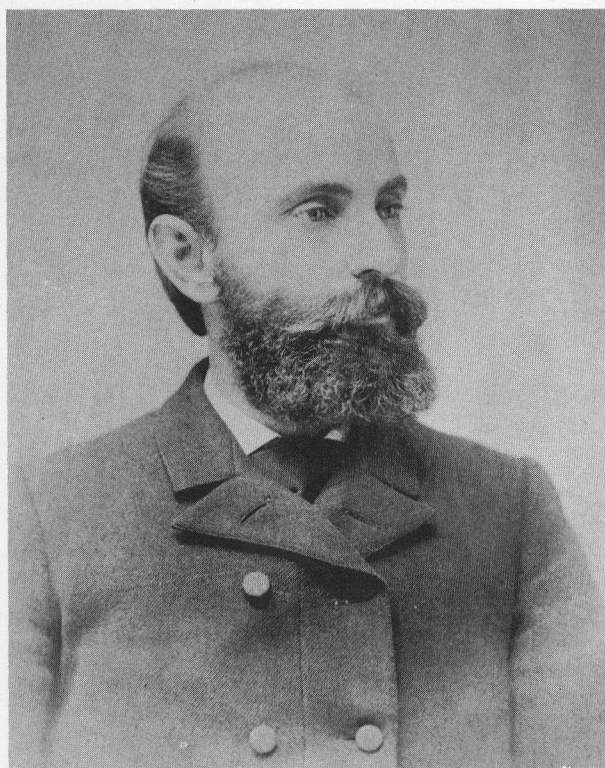


CARL BETZ

(1854-1898)

PIONEER IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION



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This history of the life of Carl Betz, pioneer in physical education, was prepared by his three daughters who still live in Kansas City, Missouri, to accompany his books, medals, citations, picture, and other mementos which they are offering to the Missouri Valley Room of the Kansas City Public Library.

*Annette Betz
Alma Betz
Louise Betz Woods*

Kansas City, Mo., July, 1962

Professor Carl Betz 1854-1898

Pioneer in Physical Education

Carl Betz, born June 1, 1854, was the son of John G. Betz and Kunigunde Leitner Betz, both of Bavaria, Germany. John G. Betz (Johann Gottlieb Betz) was born February 13, 1816, in Gaiganz, Bavaria, but later lived in Erlangen, where his father was owner of the inn. After extensive traveling in Europe and after a three years' stay in Paris, he came to America in 1843. His fiancée, Kunigunde Leitner, descendant of a south German duke, came over in 1844, and the two were married in Baltimore that year. After several years, they journeyed westward as pioneers as far as Belleville, Illinois. Here their son Carl Betz, their sixth child, was born June 1, 1854. It was in Belleville that the father, John G. Betz, became well acquainted with the prominent Germans in the St. Louis area in the pre-Civil War days. Among these were Carl Schurz, a major general in the Union Army, legislator, editor, U.S. senator from Missouri, and Secretary of the Interior; and Friedrich Hecker, who raised and led a regiment of Germans and German-Americans for the Union Army, and who for a time was a brigadier general. A few years later the family moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. Here John G. Betz became a prominent citizen, an able speaker in both English and German for the young Republican party, a member of the city council and of the school board, and twice presidential elector for the state of Minnesota, casting his vote for Abraham Lincoln. Carl Schurz visited in the Betz home whenever he was in St. Paul; and Friedrich Hecker came to see John G. Betz there too.

Carl Betz, their son, was educated in the St. Paul schools, and in 1876 completed the course of the Seminary of the Turnerbund in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which prepared him to be a teacher of physical education in the gymnasiums of the Turner societies. These organizations of German-Americans in American cities provided, among other things, physical training for children. For the next decade he instructed boys and girls for the Turner societies in South Bend, Indiana; Louisville, Kentucky; Terre Haute, Indiana; St. Paul, Minnesota; and Kansas City, Missouri.

It was on May 2, 1885, that Carl Betz presented before the Teachers' Institute of the Kansas City Public Schools a class of girls in a series of exercises with wands and Indian clubs. He explained how physical training could be introduced into the public schools, so that children's bodies could be developed and kept healthy. His report was enthusiastically received. The following fall (1885) Mr. Betz offered to conduct gymnastic exercises in the public schools for three months without pay, to demonstrate

the feasibility of the plan. After two months he was appointed director of physical training, and so, by January of 1886, Kansas City became the first city in the country with a permanent system of physical education in its public schools.

Fred E. Leonard, in his chapter on CARL BETZ in *Pioneers Of Modern Physical Training*, says on Page 113 "The year 1886 may be regarded as a turning point in the history of the German-American gymnastic societies, and there is some reason for calling the period which precedes this date the *German* one, and that which follows, the *American* one." Carl Betz's work is also described in a more recent book, Leonard and Affleck's *The History Of Physical Education*, published by Lea and Febiger. Both books have his picture.

Carl Betz wrote a series of books entitled *A System Of Physical Culture For Public Schools*. Four of these had appeared in their latest edition while books V, VI, VII, and VIII were in preparation at the time of his death. Numerous editions had been published as early as 1886 and some of his books went into a seventh printing. While his system was based on the German gymnastics taught in the Turner societies, it was not a translation of any existing book or plan. It was something new. It was an adaptation of the German system to the needs of American schools. And so, in 1886, with the adoption of the Betz system as a pattern, the American plan of physical education for public schools began. Very rapidly his system spread to countless cities all over the country, including Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Davenport. The Betz system differed from public physical education as we know it today, in that the great emphasis was on exercises which were designed to develop every part of the body, and in which every child took part. Games played a minor role.

At the end of each year the children of Kansas City under Professor Betz's direction gave elaborate closing exercises to show the parents and other citizens of Kansas City what had been accomplished. Some of these were daytime programs at the large Exposition Park. A program of May 21, 1892, shows that the exercises began, after American National and popular Airs by the Artillery Band, with a grand march by 2,000 boys and girls. Evening programs were held at the Gillis Opera House, the Warder Grand, and the Auditorium.

Carl Betz was also a pioneer in working for public playgrounds and was the first to advocate them in Kansas City. In the 1880's he worked untiringly, trying to arouse interest in this project among members of the School Board, the Park Board, and city officials. As early as in the 80's, he formulated a plan for public playgrounds and presented it to the Board of Park Commissioners. One important convert was A. R. Meyer, who later did much for

playgrounds and parks in Kansas City. It was through the efforts of Carl Betz that gymnastic classes were introduced into Central high school. (See *Kansas City Star*, October 2, 1910 - "A Pioneer of Playgrounds.")

In an article about the work of Carl Betz in *The Kansas City Star* of May 20, 1890, Superintendent James M. Greenwood is quoted as saying, "I consider Professor Carl Betz the best qualified man in the United States to teach physical culture, and I think his system, as introduced into the public schools, the best in the world. Members of boards of education, superintendents of public schools, and professional teachers of gymnastics from all over the country unite in stating that we (in Kansas City) have done what has been accomplished in no other school. We have great reason to be proud."

Carl Betz was also a musician; he played the piano and the cello; he sang, composed music, and directed. In 1881 he studied music in Germany. For several years he was the director of the Germania Maennerchor in Kansas City. A very unusual clock that was presented to him by the Germania Maennerchor in 1887 is still in the Betz home in Kansas City. For the last two years of his life he was Director of Music in the Kansas City public schools in addition to being Supervisor of Physical Education. In 1896 he published a book of songs, *Gems Of School Song*, American Book Company. In the *Kansas City Star* of 1897, sometime before (or on) November 5th, appeared the music that Carl Betz composed to Eugene Field's *Little Boy Blue*. The second anniversary of the death of Eugene Field was to be observed in the public schools of Kansas City on November 5, 1897, and Professor Betz composed the music to *Little Boy Blue* for this occasion.

He was editor of several youth magazines, among them *Deutsche Jugendzeitung*, in German; and *Work And Play*, and *Loose Leaves* in English.

In Paris in 1889, Carl Betz was awarded the silver medal and diploma by the Paris Exposition for his work in physical education in the public schools and for his books. It was the only medal in this field that came to America. The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, 1893, gave him the highest award and medal for his work in physical education and for his books. So both in 1889 and in 1893 through the work of Carl Betz, Kansas City won world-wide recognition.

His untimely death came April 28, 1898, when he was forty-three years old. He was mourned by all. A thousand children from the public schools marched in the funeral procession, and along the way from his home at 430 Bellefontaine Avenue to Elmwood cemetery stood many more. Carl Betz loved children,

and he had won their confidence and love. At the cemetery, Superintendent James M. Greenwood, a devoted friend, spoke. Then children - more than a thousand of them - sang the songs that Professor Betz had taught them, songs which he had planned that they should sing at the annual May festival that year, less than a month away.

His time of work had ended, but those that came after him eagerly carried forward the spendid work that he had begun for Kansas City and for the country.

In 1885 Carl Betz married Louise Wittig of Terre Haute, Indiana, and brought her as a bride to Kansas City. Their first home was at 1216 Baltimore Avenue, the site of the Orpheum Theater which is just now being torn down to be replaced by an addition to the Hotel Muehlebach.

Their six surviving children are Annette Betz, formerly teacher at the Kansas City, Missouri, Junior College; Alma Betz, formerly teacher at Paseo High School, Kansas City, Missouri; Martha Betz Shapley, wife of Dr. Harlow Shapley, Harvard astronomer; C. E. Betz, formerly vice-chairman of the board, Magnaflux Corporation, Chicago, Illinois; Carl W. Betz, chief engineer of tests of the County of Allegheny, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Louise Betz Woods, wife of Carl R. Woods, consulting electrical engineer, Kansas City, Missouri. There are twelve grandchildren and twenty-two great-grandchildren.

Carl Betz's widow, Mrs. Louise Betz, survived him by 58 years. She died in 1956 at the age of ninety. For many years she was an active worker in The Woman's Auxiliary to Research Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, having been their treasurer for 30 years.